

# A Guide to Implementing Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiatives in Communities



<http://www.idph.state.ia.us/>



<http://www.idph.state.ia.us/iowansfitforlife/>



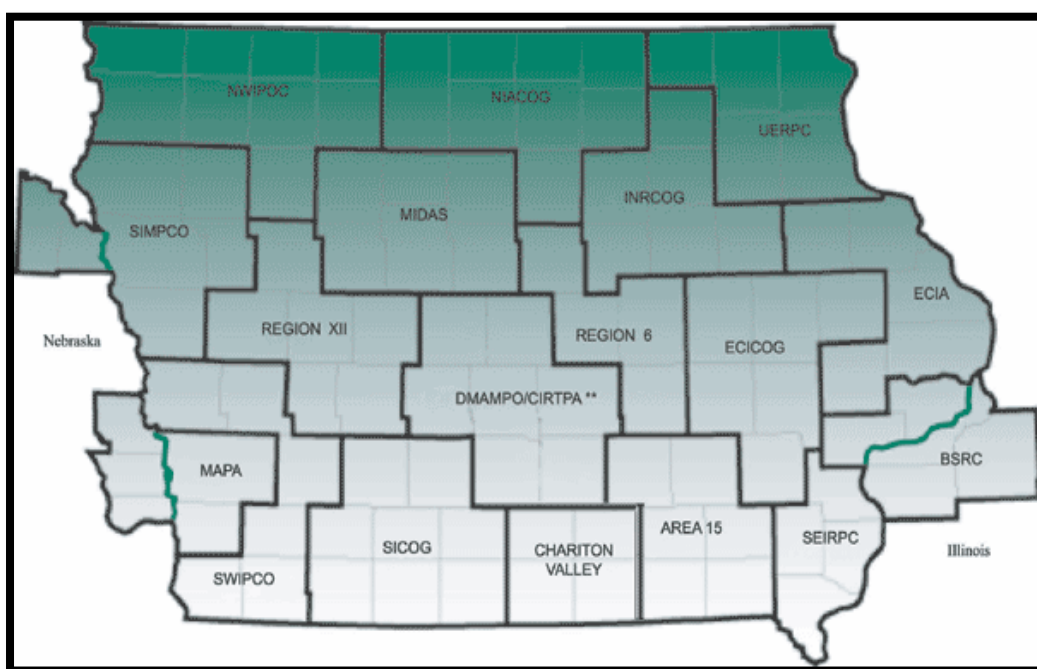
Iowa Association of  
Regional Councils  
<http://www.iarcog.com/>

## Introduction

The Iowa Association of Regional Councils (IARC) is the statewide professional organization for Iowa's councils of governments & regional planning commissions. Seventeen councils of governments & regional planning commissions currently exist in Iowa. Each of these agencies is a member of IARC. The map below shows the current regions for each of Iowa's COGs. The IARC board of directors consists of each of the executive directors from the seventeen member organizations.



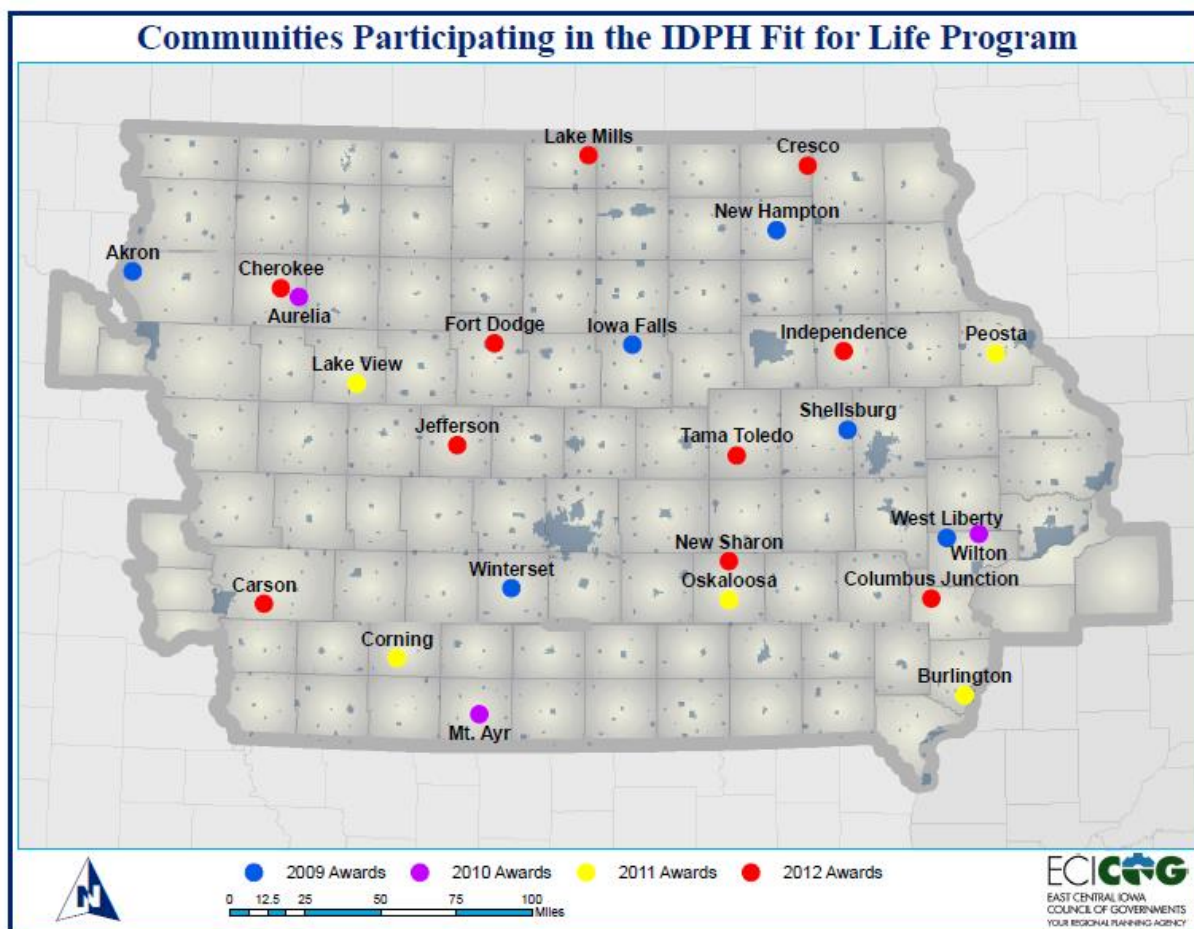
*Iowa's COG Regions*



Since its inception, IARC has worked with state and federal agencies to partner on various projects and provide services on a statewide basis through its member agencies. In 2009, the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) contracted with IARC to coordinate the state's Iowans Fit for Life initiative. In July 2009, IDPH selected six communities based on COG recommendations to create a pilot program focused on fitness and nutrition across the state. IARC and IDPH partnered to utilize local COG staff in the asset mapping and planning process in the six pilot communities. Each of the six participating COGs were tasked with providing technical assistance and facilitating the asset mapping process developed for this program. After identifying potential activities through the asset mapping process, each community was awarded \$10,000 to complete a health related community project.



*Communities/COGs involved in the Fit for Life project*



This project continued into FY 2011. Phase 2 of this project included work with elementary schools in the six participating communities. COG staff worked with school officials and community members through the same asset mapping process to identify a health related school project that can be completed. Like the community projects, school projects focused on improving students' health and increasing physical activity. Once a project and budget were developed and approved by the state, IDPH provided funding to each school to assist with project implementation.

In addition to the asset mapping exercise, participating schools were provided curriculum materials based on picking healthy snacks, and increasing student activity in the school beyond normal physical education classes. COG staff worked with IDPH to distribute these materials to the school, and collected information from the school regarding how the materials were incorporated into classroom instruction.



In April of 2011, IDPH approached IARC regarding expanding the Iowans Fit for Life project to include three new communities. Based on suggestions from participating COGs, IDPH selected three communities and asked that the community portion of this project be replicated in those three cities. The expanded project included the communities of Aurelia, Wilton and Mt. Ayr. The asset mapping exercise was facilitated by COG staff and a health related project was identified. Upon plan approval, IDPH provided funding to these communities to assist with the proposed project. This expanded project ended on June 30, 2011.

IDPH again provided funding for the Fit for Life project in FY 2012, allowing IARC and its member COGs to expand the community planning component of this project to include an additional five communities. Work under this agreement has been completed, with all five communities completing the community planning exercise and undertaking a health related community project.

In FY 2013, IDPH provided additional funding to IARC to include an additional ten communities in this program. IDPH staff approached IARC in spring 2012 to discuss the concept of developing a toolkit for COGs administering the Fit for Life program within their regions. This toolkit is designed to provide guidance and resources for organizations interested in expanding the community health initiative within their regions.

Exhibit A of this toolkit includes a power point that COG staff may use when conducting presentations on the program within their regions. This power point is useful when describing the IARC/IDPH partnership and describing steps communities will need to take to participate in this program.

### **III. Steering Committee**

As part of this project, each participating community will need to form a local steering committee. This committee will be charged with:

- Generating local interest in the project & asset mapping process by encouraging local residents to become involved.
- Identifying new partners that should be “around the table” and involved in this project
- Help collect community input
- Prioritizing projects identified through the asset mapping process
- Leading the community through the Fit for Life project

As each community is unique, the steering committee will look different in each community; The members of the committee and size of the committee will vary. Below are some suggestions and ideas for forming an effective steering committee within a participating community, based on experiences in previous communities.

Who should be represented on the steering committee?



The committee should include individuals with knowledge of the community and an interest in health and wellness. The following organizations should be considered for a local steering committee:

- County public health agencies
- Local hospital
- Economic development groups
- Chamber of commerce
- Schools
- Churches
- Local park and recreation departments/ local government
- Any local groups/ non-profits with a focus on wellness or agriculture
- Iowa State University Extension
- Local media (newspaper, radio, etc.)
- Private industry/business

What is the ideal size for a local steering committee?

The size of the local steering committee will vary from community to community, depending on community size and the organizations within the community. If a committee is too small, it may not be able to provide adequate input. However, if a committee is too large, the group may have a difficult time coming to consensus and making decisions. The thought among those COG staff members that have worked with this program previously have indicated that a steering committee of 5 to 10 individuals is often ideal.

What if the community I'm working with already has an existing committee or coalition involved in health related initiatives? Can I work with this group as the local steering committee?

Yes. In most cases, working with an existing group or coalition is beneficial for several reasons: 1. The group is already used to working together on projects/initiatives; 2. COGs/communities will not have to spend as much time trying to identify and recruit committee members; 3. The existing group may have already identified goals and projects that can be incorporated into the community's new Fit for Life program.

While working with an existing group has benefits, COGs should review the membership of the group to ensure that some of the entities listed above are represented. It may be desirable to start with an existing coalition and add 1 or 2 new members to the group to form the local steering committee.

Are there other suggestions for forming an effective steering committee?

COG staff that have worked with communities in the past have made the following observations and suggestions regarding local steering committees:

- Find committee members with different backgrounds/experiences.



- Find a local “champion” willing to head up the committee. Residents often seem more willing to participate and provide input when a local resident is leading the effort.
- Find a committee leader that can keep the group on task and run an effective meeting.
- Find committee members that are well known in the community so they can encourage others to become involved in the project.

**Steering Committee Best Practice-** Area 15 Regional Planning Commission worked with the city of Oskaloosa to identify community steering committee members that would represent a good cross section of the community. The steering committee included city council members, local residents and a school nurse.

#### **IV. Asset Mapping**

##### What is asset mapping?

Asset mapping is a planning method that focuses on available resources or “assets” within a community. Asset mapping is a positive approach that identifies local capacities, skills and resources available to promote development efforts or address a specific issue. The mapping process is designed to encourage relationships between individuals and organizations that may be able to work together to address a certain goal or issue. The goal of the mapping process is to document a community’s existing resources.

The asset mapping process:

1. Starts with what is present in the community
2. Concentrates on the agenda and capacity building of residents/stakeholders
3. Emphasizes local control and investment as well as creativity

During the asset mapping process, participants consider various levels of community assets, including individual skills/capacities, local organizational capacity, and entities/institutions in the community. However, these can be revised to meet the needs of individual communities.

For purposes of the Fit for Life project, the goal of the asset mapping exercise will be to determine how to best utilize funding from the IDPH for a community health related project by identifying community resources.

##### What are the benefits to asset mapping process?

Some benefits to asset mapping include:

- Process creates local awareness of available resources, programs, etc.
- Process focuses on relationship building between organizations and individuals
- Process can neutralize any preconceived agendas participants may have prior to the process
- Process encourages communities to take initiative by developing strategies to addressing its own unique issues
- Process encourages conversation among participants an sharing of expertise and experience



- Process can serve as a “pat on the back” for communities, providing positive feedback on what the community has accomplished to date

Are there suggested strategies for using the asset mapping tool?

There is no “one size fits all” approach for the asset mapping process; Rather, there are various approaches for using the asset mapping tool. COG staff that have used this tool and facilitated the process previously have each developed somewhat of their own approach, based on the individual community they are working with. The approach or strategy that works best will likely depend on the size of the group (how many residents attend the asset mapping exercise) and the dynamics of the group (Is everyone fairly vocal? Do one or two people tend to dominate discussion?) Below is a description of some approaches that have been used during the asset mapping sessions and some pros and cons to each of those approaches. Please note the list below is not all encompassing. A combination or variation of any of these methods could be used.

- Divide participants into smaller groups. Ask each group to write down their ideas on provided notecards. Give time for each smaller group to develop ideas and then ask each group to share their thoughts with the larger group. Some participants may be more willing to provide input if in a smaller group. Some COGs that have used this method have also asked as part of this exercise that each group to also identify specifically what they can help with as the project moves forward.
- Keep participants into one large group. Ask the group to identify assets within different scales- Home, Workplace/School, and Neighborhood/Community-wide. Identifying categories may help frame the discussion among a larger group of participants.  
One COG that has utilized this method used a laptop and projector and typed ideas as they were provided by participants. After mapping the assets, all participants received a note card and were to write one idea related to nutrition and one idea related to physical activity (one idea on each side of the card). After five minutes participants handed in their cards, and COG staff typed ideas for the group to see. Ideas were then reviewed as a group.
- Keep participants into one large group. Conduct asset mapping exercise with large group and conduct brainstorming session at the same meeting, immediately following the asset mapping exercise. Have the steering committee hold a follow up meeting to sort projects and develop final action items.

While one approach may be preferred and planned, it is difficult to know the number of participants that will ultimately attend and which groups will be represented around the table. It is important to be able and willing to adjust the method used based on these factors. Prior to the asset mapping session, it may be beneficial to think about how the process can be adjusted to accommodate smaller or larger than anticipated groups, etc. NIACOG staff working with the city of Lake Mills, reported to IDPH, “Flexibility in presentation and conducting the asset mapping session is so important.....we adjusted to the group, size, composition and weather!”





Are there ideas and suggestions for getting residents to attend and participate in the asset mapping exercise?

There are a variety of ways to generate interest in the community asset mapping meeting. Some ideas are:

- Charge each steering committee member with inviting/bringing a certain number of people to the meeting. Utilize local media to encourage residents to attend. More discussion is included on this topic in the “Community Outreach” section of this toolkit.

Can asset mapping be used in other areas of work, besides the Fit for Life project?

Absolutely! This planning approach is not unique to the Fit for Life project but can be used to address a variety of community and economic development issues. While many COGs and local governments use a SWOT analysis or similar tool when conducting strategic planning sessions, the asset mapping approach may be appropriate for some community planning exercises as well. IARC and IDPH would be interested in learning where agencies have used this planning method outside of the Fit for Life project.

***Asset Mapping Best Practices-*** The cities of Tama and Toledo held its asset mapping over the lunch hour from 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM and encouraged attendees to bring a brown bag lunch. The event had a good turn out! This idea may be good to consider when funds for food/drinks are limited.

In the city of New Hampton, INRCOG staff asked each asset mapping participant to write down on an index card one action item they were willing to assist with as the Fit for Life project moved forward. This process helped identify the key partners within the community action plan.

## **V. Community Outreach**

A critical piece of the Fit For Life program is public involvement. As COGs work with communities and facilitate the planning process, they should ensure that a good amount of public input is received and incorporated into the final community action plan. Recruiting meeting attendees can be challenging due to existing work and personal time commitments. The first step to encouraging participants to attend the community wide meeting is to make sure they are aware of the event. Community meetings can be advertised through:

- Local media- Local newspapers and radio
- Local newsletters- Chamber of Commerce/ economic development group, school district newsletters, local businesses, etc.
- Social media- Some COGs/ communities have used Facebook or Twitter as a way to inform residents of the project and community meeting.





- Flyers- Post at City Hall, community centers and other public places throughout the community
- Word of mouth- In some communities, steering committee members were asked to bring a certain number of people to the community meeting or were asked to contact groups/individuals directly to encourage them to attend the meeting.
- Public meetings- Ask to be included on meeting agendas for the school board, city council, etc. to encourage those in attendance to come and participate in the community meeting for the Fit for Life project.

Some communities also utilized websites such as Survey Monkey to allow residents to provide input on the project, even if they were unable to attend the public meeting. Once survey results are compiled, those comments/suggested received via the web can be shared at a follow up meeting when the steering committee begins to prioritize projects and prepare strategies.

Below are some additional suggestions for encouraging residents to attend the community meeting:

- Serve food- Light refreshments are always helpful in enticing people to attend a meeting, especially if the meeting will be over the lunch hour or close to the dinner hour.
- Provide as much advance notice as possible- As people are busy with work and family commitments, planning ahead is critical for most. Providing as much notice of the meeting as possible will provide more opportunities for residents to set aside time to attend the meeting.
- Be clear on expectations- Be clear on the purpose of the meeting and what you hope to accomplish. People are often less inclined to attend a meeting if they are not sure as to what the discussion will entail, what they will be expected to do, and what the outcomes will be.
- Respect the meeting timeframe- Keep the meeting to the time limit you have set aside, whether that is one hour, two hours, etc. This will help ensure the participants do not leave early and are not given an opportunity to provide input.

**Community Outreach Best Practice-** SEIRPC worked with the city of Columbus Junction to develop a community survey that residents could complete online if they were unable to attend the asset mapping session. Survey results were then incorporated into the asset mapping process and community action plan. This allows those who cannot attend the event to still participate and provide input on the community's goals and initiatives.



## **VI. Action Plan**

The final work product of the Fit for Life project will be a community action plan based on outcomes from the asset mapping process. Once the asset mapping process is complete, the steps outlined below will need to be taken to develop the community's action plan. Please note these activities should be able to be accomplished at one follow up meeting.

1. Schedule follow up steering committee meeting- After the asset mapping session is held, the community steering committee will need to meet to sort through ideas/ information provided at the asset mapping meeting. This may be held the same day as the asset mapping session, after that exercise is completed, or on a different day.
2. Sorting and naming- At the follow up meeting, the steering committee will need to sort through ideas developed during the asset mapping process. Ideas should be sorted into broad categories and named accordingly. This process will determine the community's strategic directions and identify projects within each of these categories.
3. Prioritize activities- The steering committee will complete an action matrix for each of the identified directions/categories. The matrix defines who will be responsible for the activity, timing, as well as the impact and level of difficulty.
4. Determine projects to receive funding- The steering committee will determine which projects to fund with IDPH funding by using information provided in the matrices. Some projects may be deemed too costly or difficult to complete, while others may be able to be completed at no cost through an existing community organization. Once projects have been identified, those activities should be outlined in the community action plan, which will be submitted to IDPH for review and approval.

### What is included in the community action plan?

The community action plan should contain the following information:

- Goals
- Objectives
- Activities to be completed/ Action items
- Responsible parties
- Key partners
- Timeline for completion

### Is there a specific format that should be used when developing the plan?

IDPH has developed a template to be used for developing the action plan. This template is included in the attachments to this toolkit. In addition, several examples of previous community action plans are included in the attachments.



**Action Plan Best Practice-** In the city of Lake View's community action plan, Region XII Council of Governments identified collaborative initiatives, noted all community project partners, as well identified other local funds leveraged for community projects. This allowed IDPH to easily identify the number of community partners while demonstrating the impact of Fit For Life funds on the city of Lake View.

## **VII. Resources**

Below is a list of resources that might be useful to COGs and communities participating in the Fit for Life project. IARC and IDPH staff is available to answer specific questions on the project and can provide additional resources, if necessary. A list of contacts is also included below.

### Suggested websites:

Iowa Department of Public Health- <http://www.idph.state.ia.us/>

Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Healthy Communities Program-  
[www.cdc.gov/healthycommunitiesprogram/communities/phc/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/healthycommunitiesprogram/communities/phc/index.htm)

County health information- [www.countyhealthranking.org](http://www.countyhealthranking.org)

Description of asset mapping- <http://backspace.com/notes/2004/06/what-is-asset-mapping.php>

Description of asset mapping - <http://outreach.msu.edu/bpbriefts/issues/brief4.pdf>

### Project contacts:

Nichole Warren, Executive Director

IARC

515.554.3210

[iarcdirector@live.com](mailto:iarcdirector@live.com)

Sarah Taylor Watts, Physical Activity Coordinator

IDPH

515.242.6709

[sarah.taylorwatts@idph.iowa.gov](mailto:sarah.taylorwatts@idph.iowa.gov)

Carol Voss, Nutrition Coordinator

IDPH

515.242.5566

[carol.voss@idph.iowa.gov](mailto:carol.voss@idph.iowa.gov)

## **VIII. Success stories**

### **City of Corning**

In 2012, Southern Iowa Council of Governments (SICOG) worked with the city of Corning to facilitate an Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) Healthy Iowans project. This project is partnership between IARC and IDPH and is designed to set goals, create new partnerships, and encourage physical activity and healthy eating in communities across the state.

IDPH provided the city of Corning with \$14,000 to help implement health related projects within the community. Funds were used to assist with improvements along the Pine Trail at Lake Icaria, including a new walking bridge along with new benches and mileage markers. In addition to IDPH, several community organizations partnered to complete the trail improvements including Corning High School, Adams County Secondary Roads, Adams County Conservation and the Roberts family. Project funds also assisted Adams County Conservation with the purchase of new GPS units for geocaching. Additional elements of the Corning Healthy Iowans project include free fitness classes for senior citizens and encouragement efforts for healthier food options at school, swimming pool, and sports field concession stands. New outdoor physical education equipment will soon be installed at the elementary school as part of this project.



Corning residents attend a kick off hike at Lake Icaria to showcase trail improvements



### City of Peosta

In 2012, the city of Peosta built a playground between two softball/baseball fields at the Community Recreation Centre. In past summers, children played behind parked cars and other unsafe areas near the softball/baseball field while games were taking place. The new playground equipment will provide a safe place for children to be active. Healthy food options were also integrated into the concession stand menu. Bananas, granola bars, trail mix and nuts are now available for purchase.

The Peosta community project began in November 2011 with an initial steering committee meeting. The steering committee provided guidance throughout the process and helped engage other community members in the program. Following the steering committee meeting, an asset mapping session was scheduled for a few weeks later. The asset mapping session was an opportunity for the community to identify areas of strength and weakness in terms of local healthy food options and physical activity in the City of Peosta. The steering committee met one more time in early December to review the asset map and identify projects for the community. The group decided to prioritize the healthy food options at the ball field concession stand and to provide a safe and secure area for children to play near the softball/baseball field. The \$10,000 IDPH funding would spend on the playground equipment near the softball/baseball field, which would provide safety and an opportunity for physical activity.



New playground equipment was installed in Peosta as a result of the city's Fit For Life program participation.



### City of Winterset

The Southern Iowa Council of Governments (SICOG) worked with the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) and the community of Winterset in 2010 as part of the Iowans Fit for Life initiative.

Building on the success of a local fitness program called the “Biggest Winners”, the residents of Winterset were very active in supporting this state initiative. At the initial asset mapping session facilitated by SICOG staff, approximately 50 community members and stakeholders provided their perspectives on the resources and programs already occurring in Winterset. With these assets as a foundation, community members brainstormed about the projects and services that would help Winterset become a healthier community. The local steering committee identified a number of potential projects based on the input of the community, and worked with SICOG to prioritize and develop a plan to implement these projects.

Among the projects developed from this exercise was the development of a recreational trail plan for the City of Winterset and the surrounding area. The community will use this plan will assist in targeting future local infrastructure investments and will help create a network of infrastructure to promote physical activity for families.

The city of Winterset was able to use IDPH Fit for Life funding as seed money to develop future projects and build a local coalition focused on community health.

### Cities of Tama/Toledo

Many community action plan initiatives can be completed at little or no cost. As they worked through the Fit for Life program, the cities of Tama and Toledo decided to focus on policy initiatives to improve community health that would not require much funding. These initiatives included obtaining a commitment from the Tama/Toledo City Pool board to make at least 20% of snacks sold at the pool concession stand healthy options. For just around \$3,000, the cities were able to plan several healthy cooking seminars for residents, conducted by a local dietician. Residents participating in the seminars were able to free passes to Anytime Fitness, bags of groceries, and a family pass to the local swimming pool.

### Cities of Burlington/West Burlington

In 2011, the cities of Burlington and West Burlington participated in the Fit for Life program. This was the first time a large community (over 15,000) had participated in the program. These communities were able to spread IDPH funding across several different activities focused on a variety of objectives. Through the planning process, the communities decided to allocate time and resources towards creating a master plan trails/sidewalks/bike routes, adoption of complete street policies, two community gardens, and marketing of current community health initiatives. As part of the project, the communities also identified approximately ten longer range projects that could be explored and completed after the Fit for Life project.



# **Attachments**

## **List of attachments**

**Attachment 1-** Power Point Explaining the Asset Mapping Process

**Attachment 2-** Sample Power Point Community Introduction to Process

**Attachment 3-** Sample Power Point for Community Asset Mapping Session

**Attachment 4-** Community Action plan template

**Attachment 5-** Sample community action plan #1

**Attachment 6-** Sample community action plan #2

**Attachment 7 –** Overall Project Overview – Presented on Iowans Fit for Life Webinar